

BOOKS IN REVIEW

The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End

By James L. Nolan, Jr. New York: New York University Press, 1998. 395 pages, \$18.95 (paper), \$45.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Jeffrey A. Schaler

Two things bother me about James L. Nolan's *The Therapeutic State*. One is that he does not recognize Thomas S. Szasz for inventing the term the "therapeutic state." If Nolan were to openly criticize Szasz for his conclusions regarding the therapeutic state, such criticism would constitute acknowledgment of Szasz's scholarship on the topic. Moreover, the opposition would be *prima facie* evidence of collegial respect. Nolan mentions Szasz two times. There are no footnotes to Szasz's name and work. The section of the book entitled "Selected References" cites only two of Szasz's books: *Law, Liberty, and Psychiatry* (1963) and *The Therapeutic State: Psychiatry in the Mirror of Current Events* (1984).

Nolan does not mention Szasz's seminal work, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961) and his many writings on the nature and political-economic implications of the concepts of disease and the role of the patient. In addition to Szasz's voluminous writings, he might also have considered others such as Erving Goffman, Nicholas Kittrie, Theodore R. Sarbin, and Irving K. Zola.

Perhaps Nolan means something different by the term "therapeutic state." Let us consider this in his own words: "[L]et me first make clear what I mean by the cultural phenomenon of the therapeutic ethos. When I speak of the therapeutic perspective, I am referring not to the psychoanalytic emphasis within the discipline of psychology or to specific psychological or counseling enterprises per se but to a more widespread, cultural ethos or system of moral understanding. To be

sure, it can be traced back to a psychoanalytic frame of reference, but it has spilled out into the culture more broadly. In other words, the therapeutic perspective has become a taken-for-granted part of everyday life. It provides culture with a set of symbols and codes that determine the boundaries of moral life." (p. 2)

Nolan does not clarify what he means by "therapeutic state," except that it is government infused, or "penetrated," with a "therapeutic ethos."

The second thing that bothers me about the book is substantive. Nolan does more than apply the "therapeutic state" against the conventional meaning of the term: He uses his idea of a therapeutic state to justify a return to a theocratic state.

Thomas S. Szasz, M.D., professor of psychiatry emeritus at State University of New York Health Sciences Center, created the term "therapeutic state" in 1963. He first used the concept in his book *Law, Liberty and Psychiatry*. In the last chapter of the book he writes: "Although we may not know it, we have, in our day, witnessed the birth of the Therapeutic State. This is perhaps the major implication of psychiatry as an institution of social control."

The "therapeutic state" means the practice of "medicalizing" behavior advanced by institutional psychiatry as an arm of the law. The insanity defense and involuntary mental hospitalization are the paradigmatic practices of the therapeutic state. The therapeutic state, that is, the polity of medicine and state, replaced the theological or theocratic state. The engineers of the therapeutic state implement law respecting an establishment of medicine. They seek

to circumvent constitutional prohibitions against Congress from making laws respecting an establishment of religion. The therapeutic state is a religious state masquerading as medicine.

What of the purpose of Nolan's book? He writes: "The main purpose of this project has been to investigate the possibility of a comprehensive infusion of a therapeutic ethos into the functionings of the modern state—that is, to explore culture's influence on the state.... How ... does the state application of power, based on a therapeutic form of legitimation, effect culture? ... Evidence considered here ... provides hints about what the nature and likely effect of state action will be, based on this source [therapeutic ethos] of legitimation" (p. 291).

Nolan asserts that he has provided evidence about "what the nature and likely effect of state action will be." What about the insanity defense, involuntary commitment, and deinstitutionalization, to mention just three manifestations of the therapeutic state? Perhaps Nolan regards his own conception of the therapeutic state as "good," whereas he considers Szasz's conception of the therapeutic state as "bad." There is, however, more to it than this.

There is evidence that Nolan wants to take society beyond the therapeutic state. But "beyond" in the wrong direction. Instead, he wants to take us back to the origins of the therapeutic state, that is, Nolan impresses me as being fond of the theocratic state. This is a radical departure from past criticism of the therapeutic state because it is essentially a theocratic state. Nolan seems to criticize the therapeutic state because it is not sufficiently like a theocratic state, because it has taken us away from the theocratic state.

Most critics of the therapeutic state oppose it because it is authoritarian and coercive. They place high value on personal autonomy and individualism. Nolan opposes the therapeutic state because it is apparently not authoritarian and judgmental enough. He values obedience to the moral authority of the church and collectivism. The death of the theocratic state in America occurred (at least on paper) with the

First Amendment's separation of church and state. The transition from the theocratic (church-state) to the therapeutic state (medicine-state) occurred primarily in two ways. Persons previously labeled, persecuted, and deprived of liberty as "witches" were relabeled, persecuted, and deprived of liberty as "mentally ill."

Socially deviant behavior was medicalized, and medical explanations replaced theological ones. Good behavior was now considered healthy; bad behavior was regarded as unhealthy. As Szasz showed in *The Myth of Mental Illness*, the mind can be healthy or sick in a metaphorical sense only. Diagnosis and treatment of "mental illness" became a form of social control, not medicine, as a result of the separation of church and state, that is, the theocratic state. Medicalization refers to the practice of "literalizing" mental health and illness.

The German physician Johann Weyer was instrumental in relabeling witches as mentally ill. Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence, the "father of American psychiatry" and described by alcohol prohibitionists as the "father" of the temperance movement, established a new trend in the medicalization of socially deviant behavior vis-a-vis his extraordinary use of medical rhetoric. For example, he was one of the first physicians to pronounce chronic drunkenness a disease.

Although Nolan refers to Rush in his discussion on alcoholism, he neglects to mention the enormous influence Rush had on the establishment of a "therapeutic ethos." Nor does Nolan mention Weyer. He also does not mention Teresa of Avila. As Peter Conrad and Joseph W. Schneider point out in *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness* (1980), Teresa of Avila, "attempted to save a group of 'hysterical' nuns from the Inquisition by arguing that these women were ill and that their behavior could be explained by natural causes.... Persons whose behavior could be accounted for by natural causes were not evil but rather *comas enfermas*—as if they were sick, and thus not fodder for

the Inquisition. Hence physicians rather than priests were the experts who should legitimately handle the problem" (p. 47).

Nolan also neglects Theodore R. Sarbin's view regarding evidence that the concept of mind was introduced during this period. Attributing deviance to "mind" was essential to the transition from theological explanations for behavior to psychiatric ones. Moreover, both attributions were means of formal social control established and sanctioned by the state. Mind, conscious or unconscious, has never been discovered—it is, rather, a human invention. Regardless of whether theological or mental illness explanations for deviant behavior were proffered, both were used to implement social control measures sanctioned by the state.

The first characteristic of Nolan's therapeutic ethos is that it is "self-referential." By this he means that "the individual has been left to himself or herself to establish standards of moral interpretation.... [T]he therapeutic ethos establishes the self as the ultimate object of allegiance." One might be inclined to equate Nolan's use of the term "self-referential" with the executive activity of self as a moral agent. Behavior is moral agency, mode of conduct, deportment. Behavior has reasons. Things are caused. How can self be anything but self-referential? By being "other-referential?" And what would it mean to be other-referential?

Nolan uses this well-known emphasis on human behavior as moral agency to obscure a very different meaning. To Nolan, self-referential means narcissism, the "me generation." He equates narcissism with individualism, capitalism, and personal autonomy. To the clear thinker, moral agency is neither good nor bad—it just is. That is what it means to define self descriptively. Nolan defines self prescriptively, that is, in terms of what people should and should not do. Therein lies Nolan's moralistic agenda. To Nolan, moral agency means self-referential and self-referential means narcissism. But what of autonomy? Is autonomy self-referential? Is the autonomous individual—

the one who is independent of authority and accepts responsibility for his actions—narcissistic?

Nolan defines self-referential as the individual's establishment of his or her own standards of moral interpretation. But isn't that what an autonomous individual does? Self-referential, then, according to Nolan, means autonomy. And autonomy, according to Nolan, is narcissism, which of course is "bad." Individuals can experience control in either one of two ways: They can control themselves or be controlled by others. Since self-control is self-referential, there can be only one meaning to Nolan's prescription masquerading as description: The self should be obedient to authority. But which one? The old religious authority or the new therapeutic authority?

Nolan blames the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers for the narcissistic, anti-authoritarian, therapeutic ethos: "Where Freudian psychoanalysis is essentially a therapy of adaptation, Rogerian client-centered therapy is one of liberation. The former views a binding culture, oppressive though it may be, as something the impulses of the self must struggle against. The latter advocates the replacement of traditional culture with a culture dominated by impulses. No longer is society something the self must adjust to; it is now something the self must be liberated from.... [T]he conditions of industrialized capitalism effectively undermined older forms of moral authority. Consequently, the individual has been left to himself or herself to establish standards of moral interpretations" (p. 3).

The meaning of the phrase "culture dominated by impulses" escapes me. Nevertheless, the attributions for behavior in either case—i.e., behavior caused by individual "unconscious" impulses and behavior caused by "culture-dominated" impulses—are not much different from one another. Both are strategic attempts to avoid recognizing that human behavior and moral agency are identical. What is more, they are attempts to avoid comprehension of the relationship between liberty and responsibility.

The person as a mythical “id” sought to liberate itself from the constraints of a mythical superego and ego. Freud construed abnormal behavior as the expression of intrapsychic conflict. Rogers advocated a metaphorical liberation of self from a literally oppressive environment. Rebellion is the attempt to liberate oneself from an oppressive environment. Contrary to Nolan, Rogers did not call for “the replacement of traditional culture with a culture dominated by impulses.” (He advanced instead the myth of multiple realities.)

Moreover, the “conditions” of capitalism did not necessarily undermine older forms of moral authority and cause individuals to establish their own standards of moral interpretation, as Nolan asserts. And what does Nolan refer to when he states that the “individual has been left to himself or herself to establish standards of moral interpretations?” What does he mean that the Church no longer dictates morality by means of the State? Does he mean that the therapeutic ethos has eroded the old religious authority, and people, adrift in therapeutic godlessness, will gravitate toward the paternalism of a therapeutic state?

The abolition of theocracy liberated individuals from the rule of man. People liberated themselves from the coercive power of a theocratic state through revolution and their creation of a rule of law.

In a theocratic state, people were recognized in terms of their status, that is, by their membership in a group. In a therapeutic state people are regarded in terms of their “mental health.” In a secular state, people are defined in terms of their ability to make and uphold contracts. Nolan unconvincingly suggests that capitalism caused the therapeutic ethos “penetrating” the modern American state.

According to Nolan, capitalism is self-referential, or narcissistic. What Nolan is suggesting is that capitalism undermined the religious authority of the theocratic state. That loss of moral authority was characterized by a new sense of personal power or autonomy, which Nolan equates with self-refer-

ential narcissism. He states: “Social institutions no longer bind and determine the self as they once did. More and more areas of life (vocation, beliefs, sexual identity, etc.) are now areas of choice, determined by the individual self. The therapeutic ethos is thus characterized by a conspicuous self-referencing” (p. 4).

Nolan’s second characteristic of the therapeutic ethos is what he calls the “emotivist ethic”: “If one is discouraged from appealing to religious symbols or even to divine reason in the classical sense, one is left with one’s own feelings.... The emotivist motif is also salient to contemporary life in that it represents a ‘high-touch’ departure from the ‘high-tech’ harshness of the instrumentally oriented public sphere.... The objectivity of the industrialized world undermined the authority of traditional moralities, preparing the cultural soil for a more widespread concern with emotions.... Thus, though the therapeutic ethos (and the emotivist ethic in particular) represents an attempt to break out of the Weberian ‘iron cage’—out of the alienating existence of life in the machine—it does so without referencing back to traditional cultural systems and without challenging the fundamental structure of the capitalist order” (pp. 5-6).

The discouragement “from appealing to religious symbols or even to divine reason,” according to Nolan, has a lot to do with the therapeutic ethos that penetrates the modern American state. This is strikingly similar to Szasz’s thesis that the theocratic state evolved into the therapeutic state. Yet Nolan sneaks a twist into this metaphorical metamorphosis by asserting that the “emotivist” ethic, characteristic of the therapeutic ethos, does not challenge “the fundamental structure of the capitalist order.” But why should it? And when Nolan uses terms and phrases such as “divine reason,” “traditional moralities,” and “alienating existence of life in the machine,” I want to know more about his own convictions.

One begins to detect a pattern in Nolan’s thinking throughout his book: The therapeutic ethos, assimilated by means of cultural dialectic, penetrates

the state, is not sufficiently anti-capitalist, and is not sufficiently religious, “without referencing back to traditional cultural systems.” “Traditional cultural systems” means the church, the theocracy when the state was legitimate.

The third feature of the therapeutic ethos, according to Nolan, concerns the “new priestly class”: The replacing of priests with psychiatrists and psychologists. Nolan does not write that the new priestly class is granted prestige for their *alleged* ability to help individuals make sense of life. He clearly believes that they do. In other words, he believes in the legitimacy of the new priestly class. While, on the one hand, he expresses concern about the consequences of a therapeutic state, on the other, he legitimizes it. These professionals are granted a priestly status not because they help the client but because they help the state (which pays them).

Nolan refers to the fourth feature of the therapeutic ethos as the “pathologization of human behavior”: “Behaviors that were formerly described at face value or interpreted in moralistic terms have increasingly been portrayed as pathologies.... A 1987 Gallup poll reported, for example, that 90 percent of Americans believe alcoholism is a disease” (p. 9). Nolan gives us Christopher Lasch (1977) as evidence in support of the heuristic: “the psychiatrist ... has translated ‘everything human’ into ‘mental terms of illness.’”

Most of Nolan’s evidence for the pathologizing of behavior comes secondhand from Herbert Fingarette’s *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (1988) and Stanton Peele’s *Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control* (1989). Fingarette and Peele rely on primary sources to support their assertions such as studies disproving “loss of control,” statistics on treatment failures, and sociologist Harry Gene Levine’s history of beliefs about addiction and heavy drinking. Fingarette agrees that behavior is medicalized or pathologized, in order to achieve certain social and legal goals. Regrettably,

Nolan cites Fingarette without referring to those important studies on loss of control, the very basis on which heavy drinking was pronounced a disease.

The fifth feature or characteristic of the therapeutic ethos penetrating the modern American state is, according to Nolan, "victimization." "The tendency for individuals and groups to understand themselves as victims of their abusive pasts or of the oppressive social environment that surrounds them appears to be on the rise."

Does this mean that Nolan does not believe in the existence of mental illness? Is mental illness an indication of "victimized mentality ... closely [related] to the central place of the self and the growing cultural proclivity to interpret behavior in pathological terms"? Can mental illness cause suffering? Can mental illness cause suicide? Homicide? Are persons imprisoned in mental hospitals because of mental illness "victims" or patients? Is a person who is declared incompetent to stand trial because of "schizophrenia," when he or she meets the legal criteria for competency to stand trial, a victim?

Nolan writes about the devaluing of "moral orders." What "moral orders?" Religious moral orders? Does Nolan have some kind of pro-religious bias? If so, he seems to obfuscate this bias with a mix of criticism of self and individual rights, the rise of which he describes as negatively correlated with individual claims regarding victimization. But if the therapeutic ethos is characterized as self-referential, as Nolan claims, and if this self-referential quality is coupled with the valuing of individual rights, again as Nolan claims, then how could those two variables predict an increase in the victimization criterion? How could an increased valuing in the liberation of self from its environment (as Rogers alleged), as opposed to an increased valuing in the adaptation of self to its environment (as Freud alleged), with a concomitant increased valuing of individual rights, explain variance in victimization beliefs beyond that expected by chance?

The fact is liberty and responsibility are positively correlated. A therapeutic state advances the fiction that a decrease in personal responsibility brings about an increase in personal liberty. Nolan perpetuates the same fiction. An example is that drug prohibition is the action of the therapeutic state. Advocates of drug prohibition assert that drugs cause addiction and that addicts are not responsible for their behavior. Drugs and addiction control the person, not the other way around. Since drugs and addiction "remove" responsibility, people must be deprived of the right to drugs as property. If prohibition were repealed, with the rise in liberty to use drugs must come a concomitant rise in the level to which we hold individuals responsible for their behavior.

Nolan is like a libertarian who opposes the therapeutic state in theory and believes in the existence of mental illness—and claims there is nothing contradictory about doing so. Believing in mental illness and mental health is no different than believing in witches. In summary, Nolan writes: "The therapeutic ethos—with the victim pathologies of the emotivist self interpreted for us by the priestly practitioners of the therapeutic vocations—offers itself as a replacement to traditional moral codes and symbols, worn out by the effects of modernization. In Bourdieuan terms, it is a form of "cultural capital" that has, in the contemporary cultural context, a high exchange rate (p. 17). ... The therapeutic cultural system may actually be providing a capitalistic order and its commitment to technology a well-suited cultural complement (p. 20). ... To be sure, the subjective, self-referential nature of the therapeutic model does not provide ultimate explanations for death and suffering in the way that cultural manifestations of Protestant religion once did" (p. 301).

Nolan asserts that society and the state, infused with cultural values, have adopted a therapeutic ethos. Society and the state, he claims, have done so because they suffer from insufficient "legitimation." Nolan criticizes the

therapeutic ethos as a means of legitimation, yet he also suggests that it is too early to tell what the consequences of a state "penetrated" with the therapeutic ethos will have for individual liberty. He alludes to religion as an effective means of legitimation. However, if society were to abandon the therapeutic ethos and re-embrace the traditional moral authority of religion, would the state not be "penetrated" with that religious ethos by means of a cultural dialectic and become a new (old) form of legitimation?

Opposition to the therapeutic state does not mean the abolition of religion or medicine (in this case psychiatry, that is, moral management masquerading as medicine). It is the relationship between medicine, and in particular psychiatry, and the state that has proven itself dangerous for many years now, and this relationship is what concerns the critics of the therapeutic state so. Contractual psychiatry (and medicine) can and should exist independent of the state in the same way that religion does.

James Nolan has clouded the difference between the therapeutic state and the theocratic state. For under the guise of seemingly criticizing the therapeutic state—that is, the means by which government can deprive individuals of justice and liberty in the name of medicine—he has ignored the principles so essential to casting off the chains of the theocratic-therapeutic state: individualism, the right to property, and the rule of law. In so doing he seems to be encouraging us to reshackle ourselves to what we should get beyond.

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The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End.

By James L. Nolan, Jr. New York: New York University Press, 1998. 395 pages, \$18.95 (paper), \$45.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Alan Woolfolk

In the past several years, a growing body of scholarly work has added empirical and, in some instances, theoretical weight to the original case made by Philip Rieff in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (1966) for the rise of a revolutionary personality type in advanced Western societies. Rieff first sketched the skeletal structure of this new personality type in an earlier work, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (1959), under the rubric of "psychological man," and then proceeded to flesh out the implications of his theoretical intimations with the ideal type of "the therapeutic" in the former and subsequent works. Since the publication of the first edition of *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, a number of studies ranging in content and varying in quality have picked up and explored key themes introduced in Rieff's analysis, including such well-known works as Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978), Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1984), and Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985).

In *The Therapeutic State*, James Nolan, Jr. draws upon these studies and others, including those of his mentor James Davison Hunter and Nelson Polsby, in order to explore further the paradoxes of late twentieth-century culture and, more precisely, to trace the institutionalization of the therapeutic ethos in the American political order. Much verbiage has been and continues to be written about the American "culture war," ranging from substantive

scholarly studies such as James Davison Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991), to the polemics of the popular press, to those who are skeptical about the notion altogether. What Nolan demonstrates, perhaps better than anyone thus far (although he seems hesitant at times to admit it), is that the *kulturkampf* of the late twentieth century between what Hunter has called the progressivists and the orthodox may well be over, or did not cut so deeply as first appeared.

The therapeutic has, indeed, triumphed by penetrating the institutions of the state and, beyond that, even the hearts and minds of the very individuals whom one might expect to be most opposed to any such victory. Increasingly, we all live inside a cultural world, or rather it lives inside of us, that rejects definitive moral judgments in favor of an "emotivist ethic" that proclaims the sovereignty of the self and the supremacy of psychology. "Where once the self was to be surrendered, denied, sacrificed, and died to, now the self is to be esteemed, actualized, affirmed, and unfettered." Where once religion, morality, and custom accounted for human conduct in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, today psychology guides us towards criteria of well-being and sickness, functional and dysfunctional, even in matters of religion.

With respect to the state, Nolan presents compelling evidence that the therapeutic ethos has made dramatic gains in civil law, criminal justice, public education, welfare policy, and political rhetoric in recent decades. In personal injury law, for example, Nolan

leaves little doubt that we have traversed an enormous symbolic distance in the course of this century, having begun it with very narrow legal grounds for claiming emotional damages (under the "parasitic tort" rule, emotional injury had to be accompanied by physical injury) and ending it with an explosion of successful emotional injury cases, as such injuries have moved toward an "independent tort" status, or at least an expansion of the "zone of emotional risk," since 1968. Likewise, the political fortunes of psychology have risen since mid-century. The licensing of psychologists was accepted in every state from 1946 to 1977, and the recognition of psychologists as expert witnesses occurred predominantly during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

With respect to criminal justice, therapeutic indicators also point toward a veritable legal revolution. Therapeutic approaches were pioneered under the 1972 federal program known as Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime (TASC) and continued with the Drug Court Movement that began in Dade County, Florida, in 1989, and grew throughout the 1990s. Predictably, justice has become more "personalized" in the drug courts with even judges and district attorneys assuming conspicuously therapeutic roles as "treatment" and "recovery" of offenders have become paramount. In these programs, all participants are transformed into actors in an elaborate psychodrama that focuses on the re-education of the offender. *Re-education* means that the offenders must explore the "feelings" motivating their drug abuse and learn to understand their abuse as a pathology that needs treatment like any other illness or disease.

Moreover, re-education also encompasses the officials of the criminal justice system who learn to be more understanding of offenders' pathologies and to redefine the very criteria of success. Court officials are given considerable latitude in enforcing a therapeutic regimen upon offenders, with the constant threat of imprisonment if cooperation is not forthcoming. As Nolan explains, the Drug Court movement

places a heavy emphasis on efficacy, on “what works,” and, indeed, claims a high success rate. And yet, conventional objective criteria, such as the rate of recidivism, are routinely ignored (and sometimes distorted) in favor of more subjective criteria that focus on the “needs” and emotional lives of offenders. There is, in fact, little empirical evidence that drug courts lower recidivism rates. Likewise, the widespread introduction of intensive therapeutic practices into federal and state prison programs since the late 1960s to treat substance abusers and other inmates such as sex offenders shows little evidence of reducing recidivism. The defense of therapeutic approaches rests upon a curious conflation of utilitarian and therapeutic motifs that redefines the very meaning of utilitarianism. From inside the therapeutic thought-world, the oxymoron of “criminal justice” actually begins to make sense.

Rhetoric about being “tough on crime” by Republicans and those loosely labeled as political and/or social conservatives by no means translates into an anti-therapeutic perspective because “therapeutic intervention is not synonymous with a ‘soft’ approach to crime.” Nolan deepens our understanding of therapeutic culture by demonstrating how thoroughly therapeutic assumptions have been swallowed whole by both sides in the American culture war. In public education, for instance, the triumph of the therapeutic assumptions is undoubtedly more pronounced and unchallenged with the rise of the self-esteem movement that followed upon the heels of the values-clarification movement of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s.

Implicit in Nolan’s analysis of the evolution of the therapeutic ethos in public education is an important, under-emphasized point: the self-esteem movement has triumphed where values-clarification did not—namely, with many of Hunter’s defenders of so-called cultural orthodoxy. Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, defenders of public schools and champions of private Christian

education and “school choice,” despite their many and real differences, all appear to accept the centrality of self-esteem to education, even though American students regularly score at or near the bottom on standardized, international tests and at the top on measures of self-esteem among advanced industrial and post-industrial nations. According to Nolan, discontent with American education does not translate into a critique of therapeutic assumptions but rather a focus on the problem of declining academic abilities.

Nolan traces the strange career of the therapeutic further in his discussion of welfare policy by linking the rise of emotivist language, not surprisingly, to legislative programs that originated with Roosevelt’s New Deal and Johnson’s Great Society. The New Deal’s emphasis on the “happy home” and the “happy child” evolved in the 1960s into full-blown emotivist rhetoric with the passage of such programs as Head Start and Operation Good Start. By the late 1980s, congressional debates about Head Start and child abuse legislation had pushed this rhetoric to its logical conclusion when it was argued that child abuse hurt the child’s self-esteem, rather than bothering to mention that “child abuse was wrong and immoral or that children subjected to it were being dealt with unjustly.” With the election of the 104th Congress and efforts to “end welfare as we know it” during the 1990s, one might assume that many of the therapeutic assumptions underlying the welfare state would have been challenged. But Nolan argues that the therapeutic state cannot be equated with the welfare state; for while Republicans attempted to reign-in the welfare state, they continued to employ the same therapeutic-emotivist code of moral understanding as their opponents. Democrats and Republicans alike appealed to the “value” of self-esteem as they defended and attacked various welfare programs, with Republicans simply arguing that programs in question robbed individuals of self-respect and that reform bills encouraging work increased self-esteem.

Nolan finds the same therapeutic thought-world expressed in the rhetoric of presidential debates during the last decade and by both sides in the Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill hearings. With respect to presidential politics, the gradual decline of Aristotelian ethos and logos in recent decades culminated, of course, with the triumph of pathos in Clinton. No matter how hard Bush or Perot or Dole tried to de-inhibit themselves, they were no match for Clinton’s uncanny ability to prove the emotional master of presidential politics, just as Reagan had been during the 1980s, as “I feel” symptomatically superseded “I think” and “I believe” as one of the stock expressions of American politics.

The triumph of the therapeutic in the state may not be as thorough as Nolan implies, but certainly the language justifying the use of political power is laden with disturbing assumptions about the limitlessness of human existence that he characterizes as a sort of “therapeutic utilitarianism.” Utilitarianism assumes that we can control the outer, natural world, whereas the therapeutic assumes that “we can control and re-create our inner psyches.” Despite the *hubris* of utilitarians, it is the therapeutic descent into the psychological depths that in the end may prove to be more shallow and dangerous to our spiritual and moral health. As Nick Carraway concluded in *The Great Gatsby*, tolerance must have a limit. Conduct counts. The better part of wisdom is to desire “no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart.” The passing of youth teaches us that there is such a thing as forbidden knowledge. Nolan’s book helps us to see more clearly that the ongoing tragicomedy of the therapeutic era is that we have systematically and adamantly denied precisely these lessons.

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The Modern Condition: Essays at Century's End.

By Dennis H. Wrong. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, 252 pp., \$17.95

Reviewed by Lewis A. Coser

Isaiah Berlin, the late great British man of ideas, once suggested that intellectuals might be usefully classified into "hedgehogs and foxes." The former know one big thing while the latter know many things. Dennis Wrong, who quotes Berlin, is clearly a modern fox. He covers an amazingly wide field in the seventeen chapters of this slim volume. Most of these essay-chapters have appeared before in such journals as *Partisan Review*, *The New Republic*, and *Dissent*; but all of them speak to the reader as if they were written yesterday.

Whether he writes of the uses and abuses of the term "alienation" in contemporary or near-contemporary discourse, or of the often neglected distinction between "power to" or "power over," or pays a visit to the work of David Riesman. Whether he exposes the deficiencies of the rational choice approach to human behavior or of the inadequacies of the work of Alan Bloom, Wrong always has something significant and valuable to contribute to the arena of intellectual discourse.

Some of these essays, while delighting the reader, may seem to him worthy of a more extended treatment. But Wrong, even though he has written several books, is above all a master of the relatively short but pointed essay. He reminds me of what the great Spanish philosopher, Ortega y Gasset, once said of Georg Simmel: "He is like a philosophical squirrel jumping from one branch of a tree to another with elegance and practiced skill. His high jumps of ideas may often create more intellectual illumination than the prodding and pedestrian efforts of more earthbound creatures."

I have known Dennis Wrong since we were both students of Robert K. Merton, roughly half a century ago, and I have enjoyed many an hour of intellectual exchange with him. What struck me while reading these essays

is that, though he has obviously grown intellectually since those days, he has not basically changed. He is still a man of the intellectual left but far removed from the fanaticism and lack of civility that characterized some of the academic left in the wake of the 1960s. The son of a leading Canadian diplomat and issue of a long line of Canadian academics, he was always delighted to engage in scholarly disputes but always disliked the vulgar display of the "sloganeering" left of the late sixties and after.

Rose Laub Coser, Alvin Gouldner, and a handful of other sociologists have argued persuasively that creative scholars have a variety of perspectives in their repertory, being exposed to a variety of influences, and being involved with a variety of role partners. As Gouldner states, the fundamental source of major intellectual creativity "entails an ability to cross the boundaries of an intellectual tradition and thus to escape control by a single perspective" (*Against Fragmentation*, 1985, p. 204). Dennis Wrong's final autobiographical essay, entitled "As We Grow Older The World Becomes Stranger," reads like a case study illustrating the Gouldner thesis. Born in Canada, educated in his home country but also in Switzerland, undergraduate years at the University of Toronto and graduate studies at Columbia University exposed him to a variety of intellectual influences and associations. Becoming familiar with his father's associates while at the United Nations and later as the first Canadian ambassador in Washington, socializing with young left-wing socialists or Marxist intellectuals at Toronto and Columbia, but also as a research associate of George Kennan at Princeton. Knowing the world of Dean Acheson or Felix Frankfurter but also the milieu of Irving Howe, Nathan Glazer, C. Wright Mills, and Robert Lynd, being as famil-

iar with the work of Max Weber as with the Marxist classics, Dennis Wrong became a true intellectual with his involvement with a variety of persons and with a variety of intellectual perspectives.

Wrong's fellow students at Upper Canada College voted him upon graduation the member "with the most opinions on the most subjects." They were right. Whether it be international relations, ideological politics (especially on the left), or psychoanalysis, in all these areas he has strong opinions, searching ideas, and novel perspectives. Daniel Bell once described himself as "a specialist in generalizations." Dennis Wrong, who quotes him, belongs to the same species. One may wish that there were more of them.

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Social Interaction Systems: Theory and Measurement

By Robert F. Bales. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers,
xix + 396 pages, 1999. \$49.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Richard B. Kettner-Polley

Small group research has gone through many periods of growth and decline in the past fifty years. Through it all, Robert F. Bales has remained a central figure. He has been credited with inventing the field and, since his retirement from Harvard University in 1986, continues to be active in team-based consulting. This book represents the culmination of his work on social interaction in small groups.

The structure of Bales' *Social Interaction Systems* is unusual. It begins with a reprinted introduction to *SYMLOG: System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups*. This introduction was written for practitioners, and previously published by the SYMLOG Consulting Group (SCG). It then presents the tools that SCG developed to explain group dynamics to its clients. The second section of the book provides an extended discussion of values, citing both SCG's normative data and the empirical basis for the value space as demonstrated in the 1960s by the work of Arthur Couch. The third section returns to the observational beginnings and rehashes much of the data and many of the findings from research conducted with Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) in the 1950s. The final section returns to the issue of values, to assert that there is "one best way" to think. Value profiles that deviate from the norm are highlighted as "potential problems." While Bales argues that he is not seeking to "eradicate differences," his use of a single normative value profile to predict effectiveness suggests otherwise.

Because *Social Interaction Systems* attempts to serve three purposes it

must be evaluated on the bases of all three. First, it serves as a record of Bales' academic and consulting career. Second, it presents previously unpublished material on the activities of his consulting firm, SYMLOG Consulting Group. Finally, it attempts to present a "new field theory" of social interaction.

As a record of the work of R.F. Bales, the book is a success. It chronicles his efforts over the past fifty years and credits the large number of students and collaborators who have contributed to the work. The one downside to this chronicle is that SCG's more recent work overshadows the serious research that Bales and his colleagues conducted during his long tenure at Harvard. Accordingly, it does a better job of presenting the activities of the consulting group than it does elaborating on Bales' full research record.

Repeated reference is made to field theory, and Bales has previously published articles citing his "new" field theory. This is the weakest aspect of this book. Bales and the SYMLOG Consulting Group seem to have been working in an intellectual vacuum. Extensive reference is made to their own work, but little acknowledgment is made of the fact that there are a great many other theoretical and empirical streams of small group research. An integration of the findings of this diverse body of research is necessary for the construction of a truly general theory of social interaction.

Bales is probably best known for his *Interaction Process Analysis* (1950), which presents a general method for real-time observation of small group interaction. While various revisions

have been proposed by others, most notably Edgar Borgatta, interaction process analysis (IPA) remains one of the most commonly used observation methods for small group researchers.

In 1970, Bales published *Personality and Interpersonal Behavior* and introduced a three-dimensional space. The methodology for placing people in the space involved retrospective rating by group members and/or observers. Over the course of the next decade, Bales and his colleagues translated the three-dimensional model into a "salient act coding scheme" that allowed for the sort of real-time observation that IPA offered. The source of this method is Bales, Cohen and Williamson's *SYMLOG: A System for the Multiple Observation of Groups*. The difference was that IPA coders selected the most important acts and coded them in more detail. The three-dimensional space yields 26 possible vectors and coding is conducted on multiple levels: overt behavior, nonverbal behavior, and content. Content coding is used for value-laden statements that indicate an acceptance or rejection of an image that represents one of the vectors in the space. For example, a statement may be made in an authoritarian manner (UNF in SYMLOG language) but the speaker may be showing the exact opposite nonverbal behavior, alienation and withdrawal (DNB). The content of the image may also be at odds with the behavior. For example, this person may actually be speaking against authoritarianism. The simple sentence coding of this message would be as follows:

JOE GRP A UNF C UNF OTH
JOE GRP N DN

This indicates that Joe was speaking to the group in an authoritarian manner while showing underlying alienation. The content was in opposition to authoritarianism in another group member. While the method is more complex than can be presented here, this demonstration should give a feel for the nature of the observation methodology. Elaborate algorithms

were developed for translating observations into locations in the three-dimensional space by Swann and Polley, and (by Polley) for identifying subgroup clusters and polarizations within the space.

One of the weaknesses of *Social Interaction Systems* is that almost no reference is made to the observation system. This system had major benefits compared to the retrospective rating systems that Bales is now using in his consulting endeavors. One of the benefits of the observation method is that while retrospective ratings change slowly, direct observation can detect changes in behavior and images on a minute-to-minute basis. The cost of doing direct observation, however, has caused this method to fall out of favor with researchers and practitioners alike, but there are many research questions that can only be addressed through the use of such time-sensitive techniques. In addition, Bales has rejected the search for complex patterns of polarization and subgrouping in favor of a simplistic method based on a fixed polarization running from the democratic quadrant to the rebellious quadrant. With this technique of identifying polarizations, the three dimensions are redundant. Now, conservatives are positive and liberals are negative.

On a related note, SYMLOG's entire value measurement system has been criticized as being biased toward conservative values. This bias is reflected in the scatter diagrams that appear in the present book. Only a small number of accepted values appear in the unconventional side of the space. Indeed, few people see themselves as being on the unconventional side. Conversely, while some people seem to reject authoritarianism, almost all reject rebellion and alienation. Alternative forms have been proposed in the past that show a more uniform distribution of values across the conventional-unconventional dimension.

Applications of the SYMLOG method were published in Polley, Hare, and Stone's *The SYMLOG Practitioner*. The majority of these studies used the retrospective rating method, which became the standard for both the SYMLOG Consulting Group and more recent research. The loss of a social interaction laboratory for direct observation when Bales retired from Harvard has seriously slowed progress in understanding group dynamics. Regrettably, few researchers are employing the observation method at this time.

Social Interaction Systems continues the trend that began with *The SYMLOG Practitioner*. However, there is little mention of direct observation and all of the data presented are based on retrospective ratings. What is more, the grand theory of social interaction is given only minimal attention. Bales repeatedly suggests that his three-dimensional value space provides the context for a grand theory, but he makes no attempt to integrate the work of others into such a theory. Perhaps most perplexing is the inclusion of a twenty-five page bibliography. Were the findings of all of these articles and books actually cited and integrated into the body of the book, there would indeed be a potential for a general theory. Unfortunately, most of these references are cited only in passing and a great many of them are not cited at all. For historians of the field, *Social Interaction Systems* is a valuable compendium of the work of a remarkable scholar; but it is of less use for the practical theorist seeking a substantive general theory.

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Social Science Books of the Month

Peter Lewis Allen. **The Wages of Sin: Sex, Disease, Past and Present.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. \$25.00.

Alice Kaplan. **The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. \$25.00.

Victor Klemperer. **The Language of the Third Reich: LTI—Lingua Tertii Imperii. A Philologist's Notebook.** London and New Brunswick: The Athlone Press, 2000. \$90.00.

Richard B. McKenzie. **Trust On Trial: How the Microsoft Case is Reframing the Rules of Competition.** New York: Perseus Publishing, 2000. \$26.00.

Anthony D. Smith. **Myths and Memories of the Nation.** Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. \$24.95.

John Parris Springer. **Hollywood Fictions: The Dream Factory in American Popular Literature.** Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. \$38.95.

Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace

By Thomas L. Pangle and Peter J. Ahrensdorf. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999. 362pp.

Reviewed by Peter Augustine Lawler

Pangle and Ahrensdorf rightly say that international relations theory, properly understood, is a branch of political philosophy. There is no way to make consistently prudent judgments about foreign policy without a true understanding of human nature, of human possibilities and limitations. The authors are both utopian and anti-utopian. They want to free human beings from the delusions coming from the false reliance on either God or history, but they also want to restore the classical view that morality and civilization are justified by the grandeur of the life of the philosopher. They combine a practical realism that might be mistaken for fatalism with an intense devotion to civilization understood as cultivated rationalism. They hope to recapture the political moderation characteristic of Socratic philosophy, tempering human hopes and demands while avoiding despair and misology.

The book's greatest strength (and there are too many to list) is this use of the approach to political philosophy rediscovered by Leo Strauss to criticize the dominant American schools of international relations theory today, realism and idealism. After reading this book, nobody could agree with the common criticism that political philosophy has nothing to say about the real world of political action and political choice. And few could agree with the more sophisticated criticism that Straussism is nothing more than conservative ideology. Pangle and Ahrensdorf are clearly political moderates, and they have written a most formidable and radical criticism of the perennial human phenomenon of the "religious right."

Pangle and Ahrensdorf explain that idealism, coming to America from Kant through Woodrow Wilson, is either hypocrisy or stupidity. Actions taken on behalf of the nation's interests have to be defended in terms of disinterested universalism. Or even worse, the president might actually believe that good wars are fought over "values," and bad ones over "interests." A deeper modern idealism, coming from Hegel and Nietzsche, more radically opposes the bourgeois or uncourageous world of interests. It defends war as a stimulus to courage and human excellence in decadent times, as an antidote to a Hobbesian devotion to peace at any price. Americans, thank God, have always been too sensible or not political enough to have really bought bellucose idealism. But neither do they find it completely un compelling. They cannot help but know that a self-respecting nation must stand for something more than self-preservation or a defense of its interests, and so they are a bit nostalgic now for the cold war and more than a bit confused on what to make of our commitment to Kosovo.

Much of the academic study of international relations in America has been critical of Wilson's idealism. Hans Morgenthau's "realism" and later Kenneth Waltz's "neorealism" are based on the premise that nations usually do and always ought to act simply according to their interests. The illusion that they can do more wrecks the indispensable conditions for peace and civilization. But these realistic theorists are not realistic enough, according to Pangle and Ahrensdorf, about the human devotion to moral freedom.

Morgenthau and Waltz, following Hobbes, hold that human beings and nations can be taught to dismiss idealistic crusading as irrational and to behave much more predictably by acting only on behalf of their interests. This choice of fear over courage is aided by imagining the consequences of war in our high-tech conditions. Fear of nuclear war, we can hope, may well lead to global peace. Modern realism is in one sense a sort of closet idealism; war will wither away. But that idealistic, progressive hope is actually unrealistic; human beings will never consistently prefer peace to freedom. Moral and religious passions might often be unreasonable, but they are an ineradicable part of human nature. The "human concern with mortality" cannot be reduced to a relatively calm and predictable calculation based on fear.

For realism to become more realistic it has to in another sense become more idealistic. A compelling defense of peace has to be in terms of the human good that transcends "mundane security" that is served by peace, and war on behalf of that good will always be sometimes unavoidable and even beneficial. Only by properly defending peace as the precondition for the height of virtue can we show that a world without war would be less than human. Such an account is what Pangle and Ahrensdorf find missing in all modern realism and idealism, going back to Machiavelli.

The authors move from the modern conflict between realism and idealism to the more fundamental and enduring conflict between reason and revelation. For them, the crucial issue is whether there is a providential God or whether human beings are on their own, with reason as their only guide. In some ways they lump together the ancient Greek piety, Stoic pseudo-rational cosmopolitanism, and Christian and Islamic belief in biblical revelation. But they emphasize that Christian belief in particular makes human beings excessively moralistic or fanatically punitive in their political opinions and too ready to trust in God or too certain about "natural law" for the good of genuinely prudential judgments.

Pangle and Ahrens Dorf's realistic criticism of Christian idealism is that it demonizes beyond reason one's adversaries, neglecting the fact that in almost any human conflict some mixture of justice and injustice is found on both sides. The angry civic spirit and treachery required to wage war successfully always robs intentions of their purity. Just war theory, which originates with Christianity's distortion of theory or philosophy, is always inadequate to the necessities connected with self-preservation, and in the absence of a providential God, they must come first. Its unrealistic tendency, characteristic of the Bible, is to put "absolute legal justice" before "social utility." This book is worth buying just for the fine criticisms in the notes of the imprudent legalism of today's Catholic natural-law theorist John Finnis on the killing of "innocents," the reduction of the purpose of war to self-defense, the use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese, and by implication on capital punishment, and I note with satisfaction that the criticisms are made from the perspective of earlier Thomists.

But Pangle and Ahrens Dorf also have an idealistic criticism of Christian realism or natural law. The false, apparently Thomistic, conclusion that human beings can know religious truth by nature leads to wars, allegedly serving charity, on behalf of truth and against error. Foreign policy determined by biblical revelation readily produces crusades or jihads and in the Spanish case brutal imperialism justified by care for the souls of the recalcitrant Native Americans. And the secularization of the thought that providential truth is known to the human mind also justified the idealistic wars on behalf of history that began with the French Revolution and that plagued the century now at an end. Pangle and Ahrens Dorf claim to follow Edmund Burke in defending the naturalness of practical "diversity" against all forms of imposition of ideological truth on political life. Burke's one fundamental disagreement with his "favorite authority," the Roman Cicero, came from Burke's "loathing

of universal empire." The empire Cicero defended was rooted in Roman patriotism, but an empire rooted in universal principles would have to be either Christian or ideological tyranny.

Otherwise the authors follow Burke insofar as he is "the greatest modern disciple of Cicero," and he, together with two other English statesmen, Thomas More and Winston Churchill, are presented as defenders of the prudent mixture of political realism and philosophical idealism characteristic of the classical thinkers Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero against various Christian and modern dogmatic excesses. Churchill was unblinded by legalism and understood profoundly and defended reliably the distinction between civilization and barbarism. We read in the notes that the British imperial Indian Civil Service was both morally great and successful because of its members' schoolboy study of Plato. More, we discover, was not only an ironic critic of medieval Scholasticism, which he surely was, but not really a Christian at all. The authors say More was a Socratic martyr against Machiavellian or modern innovations in philosophy. For this amazing assertion, the only evidence they give is his accuser Cromwell's self-proclaimed Machiavellianism, and not a word of More during his time in prison. But anyone who has read More's prison writings knows that his devotion to Jesus was genuine and more primary than his devotion to Socrates. We can say that Pangle and Ahrens Dorf have not grasped the full irony of More's death, because they hold that any thinker of the first rank could not really believe. And they also miss some of the irony of a Socratic dying to do what he can to preserve what was the most Catholic country in Europe. More's death was the culmination of his lifelong effort to suppress heresy, one which included having the most recalcitrant heretics put to death. If that is the duty of the pure Socratic, then the harmony between reason and revelation is much greater than is usually supposed.

As that example shows, this book is in places a rather militant or unironic

defense of irony. The duty of the philosopher, or true statesman, is to some great extent to accept as necessary and to a lesser extent attempt to moderate the pious delusions about morality of a given political order. But he must not believe any of them. The authors' main criticism of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas is that they were "utterly" unironic about the truth of Christian doctrine, and so they mucked up reason or what we can really know about human nature with their faith. Their readings of the classical political philosophers are sympathetic, penetrating, and pretty uncritical. Their readings of Augustine and Thomas (and Thomists) are unsympathetic, comparatively superficial, and full of criticism. They say nothing positive about the Christian understanding of virtue and human freedom, but even according to natural reason, there must be something to be said for humility and charity.

The authors also downplay the areas of agreement between Christianity and classical political philosophy on the limits of political life. And to say that there is no irony in the deceptively simple teaching of Thomas's *Summa* is to be tone deaf to the dialectical implications of its distinctive version of the question and answer method. The book's "deepest theme" has to do with the conflict between rationalism and "traditional prophetic revelation," and the authors take a side in this war. Pangle and Ahrens Dorf's assertive and confident style of writing also sometimes seems more polemical than either scholarly or philosophical, although the scholarship and level of philosophical analysis are both always extremely impressive. *But I have nothing against a polemic that does some good.*

Why would a polemic against revealed religion today do some good? It might free us from our false hopes in God and history for a true analysis of our situation. But that sounds way too existential or fashionable to be particularly interesting! It might make clear what the true purpose of human civilization is, the philosophical life. By seeing the true cosmopolitanism, to-

gether with the fact that it cannot be a political goal, we can redeem the necessity of the particularity or chauvinism of political life for human flourishing, and we can reformulate civil theology according to the irreducible, vital tension between political devotion and the life according to nature. The "highest civic duty," according to Pangle and Ahrens Dorf, of the classical political philosopher is the formulation of such a theology.

But our religion cannot become again either natural theology and civil theology, because St. Augustine's criticism of those theologies is true (whether or not the positive dimension Christian theology actually is). Civil theology comprehends human beings only insofar as they are citizens, natural theology only insofar as they are part of nature. But as insistently particular beings, they have longings that transcend the city and nature, or at least elude political and natural satisfaction.

Any attempt to restore the classical view that peace is preferable to war because it is for some humanly worthy goal cannot succeed even, or es-

pecially, today without the assistance of the transpolitical aspirations of revealed religion. It is not enough to say that all our moral aspirations or desire for freedom point in the direction of philosophy alone or that the life of the philosopher is the only form of "genuine human excellence." That extreme view is does not conform to human experience. Biblical religion is an indispensable part of the mixture of nationalism or patriotism and cosmopolitanism that is still the West, and it is the one that without God's help seems more endangered than philosophy or rationalism. Granted, both reason and revelation need help, but surely they need help together. From that point of view, Thomism needs and deserves a more sympathetic treatment than Pangle and Ahrens Dorf are willing to give it.

On this point, I can call upon the authority of the authors' mentor, Leo Strauss. He wrote that the vitality of the West is the tension between the claims of reason and those of revelation, and so all attempts to abolish that tension on behalf of either wisdom or God oppose the elusive greatness that

is human, including political, liberty. The complete victory of one view of human purpose over the other would be devastating for human life. Strauss taught not only that human beings will always need religious faith to live well, but that the deepest claims of revelation cannot be refuted by reason. He was not a Thomist, because he did not think that reason and revelation could be harmonized or synthesized. His view, instead, is that we must do what we can to do justice to the tension between the two, and that those inclined toward reason or the life of the philosopher should not become so full of hostility toward theology that they attempt to banish faith or mystery from the world. That anti-religious excess Strauss found in modern philosophers from Machiavelli through Marx, and I see it, at least sometimes, in Pangle and Ahrens Dorf too.

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